

New Brunswick Strategic Planning Proposal

Proposal Title: Advisory Council for Business and Administrative Services

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Primary Strategic Priority/Foundational Element/Integrating Theme Addressed: Effective and Efficient Infrastructure and Staff

Proposal Abstract (brief summary of the proposal – 250-word limit):

Operations are managed differently across the university which complicates the complex environment that is Rutgers University – New Brunswick. Currently, there exists a gap between the *business* of the University and practical implementation and understanding/interpretation of policies, initiatives, and other decisions that directly or indirectly affect operations. The campus – and more broadly, all three campuses - can improve operations through thoughtful and inclusive collaboration with individuals that represent academic and administrative areas. This proposal suggests that an **Advisory Council for Business and Administrative Services** be created to work with officers from various central administrative offices to share expertise and coordinate services with close attention to operational assurances. The council participants will be responsible for providing constructive advice as the university improves practices, formulates policy, implements systems, and more. Through thoughtful discussion and participation at all levels involved, the Business Council’s goal is to achieve an effective and efficient infrastructure and staff. Additionally, they can provide a vehicle for vertical integration of communication efforts that enable existing and new pathways for information sharing.

Note: Having discussed this proposal with several colleagues (Associate Deans and Administrative Directors), there is shared support for convening a business council – or one that would act in a similar capacity as is described in the full proposal. There is no intention to replace any governance body already in existence, but rather complement those groups by evaluating myriad administrative initiatives that impact the business of the university.

Full Proposal Description (5-page limit)

A. WHAT: Advisory Council for Business and Administrative Services

The Advisory Council for Business and Administrative Services (Business Council) would serve as an advisory body to the Central Administration with regard to the promulgation and implementation of policies, procedures, and any necessary implementation of the same that impact operations. Representing each academic and administrative unit on the New Brunswick Campus, the Business Council would operate under guiding principles that “value university workforce contributions and support the educational, research, service, and clinical missions” as stated on page 44 of the February 2014 Strategic Plan for the New Rutgers (U-Plan). As the organizational structure currently exists, normally, there one or two individuals at the unit level (i.e., school) responsible for operations and business functions yet there is no committee or group that incorporates all aspects of the business toward the end that operational efficiencies are achieved. As needs occur, small groups are formed, often with representatives willing to participate, but not necessarily with individuals focused on the big picture that also have relative working knowledge of all the moving parts – cogs in the wheel for lack of better words.

The Business Council would serve to meet this need by convening regularly with representatives from the central offices at least four times per year and as necessary. The meetings would include two-way problem solving communication with representatives from the following areas: finance and budgeting, human resources and academic labor relations, pre- and post-award grant/contract administration, risk management, institutional research, facilities, information technology, public safety, institutional diversity and inclusion, environmental health and safety, and others areas later defined. Because those staff responsible for operational effectiveness at the unit-level often deal with issues that touch each of the areas stated in the previous sentence, it is of utmost importance that central officers coordinate activities of the universities with these representatives in coordination with their respective counterparts. Furthermore, as the University moves toward Responsibility Center Management coordination of efforts and discussion around services at the central level and those at the local level are important. The Business Council would effectively move the cogs in tandem.



Ensuring a proactive and responsive network of individuals with the necessary administrative and business acumen can only benefit the university, the campus and each unit. Engaging the business community of the university in this way can enable evaluation of intended and unintended consequences of policy and procedural changes and help measure success. It is not expected that this group would simply focus on systems issues, but rather big picture policies that directly and indirectly impact operations throughout the institution as well as any implementation whether systems related or not that impact the business.

What it IS:

- A **constructive forum** that complements the role of central officers through information sharing, discussions of intended and unintended consequences, and considerations of right practices to ensure principled decision making while improving the business/administrative environment and assuring compliance. A guiding principle is to generate ideas for realistic and tenable solutions.
- A body of **competent individuals with administrative, business and operational acumen** that can influence policy, procedure, and operational efficiency.
- **Influence central officers.**
- **Solution generating** focused on effective and efficient operationalization of policies and initiatives that directly and indirectly impact administrative infrastructure.
- **Two-way communication** for improving/stabilizing operations.
- A **communication leg** of the central administration...any decisions made or implementations in progress should be communicated by this group throughout the campus.
- A group that can provide **change management** and **foster community engagement**.
- A group that holds all participating with the Business Council accountable (because advisory councils can quickly become ineffective, it is imperative that similar commitment is expected by all involved).
- Complementary to other informal and formal groups (e.g., associate deans, business managers group, DGCA advisory group and others that may exist).

What it is NOT:

- An outlet for complaints without solutions.
- A forum forcing decisions on central administrative officers.
- One-way communication of central officers to local representatives.

B. HOW this proposal aligns with the strategic plan:

The Business Council aligns with every area of the strategic plan as it will strive to ensure operational efficiency and effectiveness necessary to broadly support the efforts and initiatives of the institution and its community members. As President Barchi has previously indicated, the administration and administrative systems need to be taken for granted. While this could be misunderstood, it is important for many to realize this to mean that the people, the policies, and the systems responsible for supporting University operations need to be efficient and effective; they also need to be responsible, competent, accountable, and trusted. As the existing environment demonstrates, too often decisions impacting operations are made with limited or without inclusion of the individuals responsible for ensuring change at the schools, administrative offices, and other local levels, and central offices are later surprised with the resulting impact on organizations. There is also evidence to indicate that communication has failed to occur between the central offices responsible for some element of whatever change is at hand - rehashing known issues is not necessarily productive nor beneficial – and those individuals who can affect change in their respective units.

Currently the many channels for communication are not strategic, do not provide relevant information to those who need it, and do not exist in a well-integrated way. While there are many groups with expertise that should continue to meet and develop standards and share knowledge, the Business Council's objective is to ensure all crossroads of operations and its many functions are well developed. To ensure policies are understood and interpreted correctly, and to enable

proficient business acumen across units at the university, the Business Council can work toward the goal of securing effective and efficient infrastructure and staff. Furthermore, the Business Council could encourage “an ethos of service and support, and nurture a culture of faculty and staff development.” (U-Plan, p. 45).

Considering specific objectives of the U-Plan, the Business Council can serve to effect achievement with robust administrative policies and practices that enable the academic, research and service missions; that support initiatives with detailed understanding of impact; that rely on shared knowledge and understanding to benefit operations. Paired with the idea that Business Council can also work to achieve better knowledge and understanding of hiring, recruitment, and retention, of policies that impact grant/contract proposal development and can grow services offered at the local levels allowing faculty and other entrepreneurial community members more time to engage in their activities without tedium of burdensome administrative work, can only positively impact faculty excellence. There is of course the assumption that faculty members would work equally to nurture a changing culture inclusive of both faculty and staff development.

C. Additional themes, priorities and elements addressed

The Business Council could provide the university with the opportunity to formulate linkages that may impact the ability to “conduct cutting edge research”, “transform the student experience”, and “evaluate [divisions] of administrative services”. The Business Council could as a primary objective work to draw links between various implementations that are crosscutting in nature, but not necessarily developed as such. Currently, multiple committees have formed to develop and implement systems from the fit-gap working team for the university’s administrative system to PeopleAdmin for human resources to the Research proposal development tools to responsibility center management. Those who run each group are not often equipped with the knowledge of other activity elsewhere in the university and do not make connections when they exist. The Business Council can assist with this effort and make suggestions and evaluate administrative services for fit to the right practices for the university with the knowledge and understanding of what is happening across units. Certainly, the Business Council’s progress would be dependent upon the sharing of information from central officers and providing transparency of activity and information.

D. Who will participate

The Business Council will include competent participants who know and understand the impact of policies, procedures, and systems that directly and indirectly affect operations. This could include the chief business officer for every school and administrative office that report to the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Vice President for Administration.

To qualify for participation each member must have responsibility for budgeting, finance, human resources, and/or information technology or have responsibilities to the majority of these areas with access to individuals in their units that have complementary responsibilities. They must have demonstrated business acumen and the ability to communicate effectively as well as foster constructive participation and change management.

The Business Council will work directly with the central officers responsible from the various offices that are charged with providing administrative services to their community members and completing the business cycle for their respective units.

E. Desired outcomes

Informed, effective, efficient and empowered staff who work side-by-side with central and local administrators, with faculty and students, with other internal community members, and with external constituents. Empowering staff with information, tools, knowledge, and the ability to provide input or seek better understanding of policies, practices, and systems can do nothing but benefit the university whatever its strategic plan. Should this proposal be accepted and implemented, it is vital that all participants from central offices and from local areas respect the role of the Business Council and take its purpose seriously. It also requires that every individual appointed to the Business Council is held accountable whether that be through their performance evaluations, or through the effectiveness of the Business Council. The absence of accountability would surely lead to failure and risk a missed opportunity to streamline operations and communication related to the business of the university. Additionally, because this advisory group could work with the various administrative areas to develop long-term and effective professional development, we can expect to see improved employee relations.

F. Anticipated resources to support this initiative

There would be limited financial resources necessary to support this proposal because participants of the Business Council already receive a university salary. While human resources have tangible costs, the intended consequence would be more effective and efficient administrative services throughout the university at the university, campus, and organization (academic, student affairs, and other administrative) levels. Success of this group will result in undetermined operational savings that add value to the operational and functional perspective.

Each member of this group should have the appropriate university training for fulfilling their obligations. While such training should exist upon employment and throughout an individual's career at the university, no programs currently exist. This proposal makes an assumption that the long-term objectives of the university's focus to improve and provide robust training and professional development will be satisfied at some time in the near future; this said, costs associated with training and professional development should already be borne by the university, be made available to this group (and to those in their areas supporting operations), and be updated annually and as needed.

Proposed Measures to Mark Progress or Determine Success

Ways in which to measure the success of the Business Council will need to be developed. Because it is expected that the impact of this group will be gradual and not immediate, there is time to determine best measurements. Even so, some baseline data like staff satisfaction surveys would be useful (e.g., do you have the tools you need to do your job?, do you understand the policies that impact your work?, what tools do you need to do your job?, are you confident that any advice you supply is accurate? – if you answered yes, why? If you answered no, why?). Even so, anecdotal rewards will be experienced as dissemination of knowledge should improve so long as the role of the Business Council is respected by central officers and those appointed to the Business Council are committed to it and involved in it. In addition to working toward administrative efficiencies and effective staff resources, this proposal seeks to chip away at cultural skepticism associated with the administration and business processes, developing an administrative services assessment survey within the first year, and administering an update annually, or in conjunction with other university surveys could prove useful and may satisfy more than one use – this Business Council, RCM service assessments, etc.